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# The employment policy and vocational activity support system for people with intellectual disabilities in Poland: emancipation policy or apparent actions?

**ABSTRACT:** Agnieszka Woynarowska, *The employment policy and vocational activity support system for people with intellectual disabilities in Poland: emancipation policy or apparent actions?* Interdisciplinary Contexts of Special Pedagogy, no. 31, Poznań 2020. Pp. 95–126. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 2300-391X. e-ISSN 2658-283X. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14746/ikps.2020.31.05>

This article presents problematics related to social policy and the system supporting the vocational activity of persons with intellectual disabilities in Poland. Analyses aimed at finding an answer to the question posed in the title are based on the results of a research project entitled *Employment and disability. An analysis of the vocational experience of people with intellectual disabilities in Poland*, which aimed at an exploration of the policy of the employment of persons with disabilities, practices in the area of employment services, and a reconstruction of the experience of subjects involved in the work situation: job coaches, persons with intellectual disabilities, and coordinators of employment projects. The methodological framework of the project was provided by the grounded theory set in social constructivism as presented in Charmaz's works. The research material was collected in 25 workplaces employing persons with disabilities in various parts of Poland, mainly by means of in-depth interviews, observation, and field notes. The paper presents only a small fragment of the research results. The analyses focus on the presentation of the assumptions, goals, and trends of the employment policy, ways of functioning of the system of support of the vocational activity of persons with intellectual disabilities, and the confrontation of these systemic assumptions with the experience of persons involved in the implementation of this employment policy in the Polish reality. The

article is therefore a critical analysis of the current policy of the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities, unmasking the existing paradoxes and apparent actions in the system of vocational support and the labour market.

**KEY WORDS:** intellectual disability and work; employment policy; vocational activity support system

## Introduction

This article discusses problems related to the policy of the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities and the functioning of the system supporting their vocational activity in Poland. The article presents answers to the following questions: what policy of employment of persons with intellectual disabilities is implemented in today's Poland? Are we dealing with an emancipation policy or its feigned version? How does a system supporting the vocational activity of this group of citizens function? The article is a critical analysis of the current policy of the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities, unmasking the existing paradoxes and apparent actions in the system of vocational support and the labour market.

The employment policy for persons with disabilities and the system supporting the employment of this group of citizens built on its basis have been developed in democratic Poland for over twenty years following the fall of communism in 1989. It is now worthwhile to note that in socialist Poland, before the transformation of its political system in 1989, in the conditions of the socialist work ethos and socialist productivism, where the rehabilitation of people with disabilities was discussed almost solely in the medical context, a subsystem of rehabilitation referred to as the "Polish model of employment" was developed.<sup>1</sup> People with disabilities found employment

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<sup>1</sup> J. Mikulski, *Vocational rehabilitation of the disabled (Rehabilitacja zawodowa osób niepełnosprawnych)*, [in:] J. Auleytner (eds.), *Social Policy. State and Perspectives (Polityka społeczna. Stan i perspektywy)*, Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna Towarzystwa Wiedzy Powszechnej, Warszawa 1995, pp. 220–230.

in what was referred to as cooperatives of invalids. Being a relic of the hated system and a symbol of the segregation policy, the system was abolished after the 1989 transformation. The abolishment of cooperatives was carried out mainly for political reasons rather than socioeconomic ones.<sup>2</sup>

Political changes, i.e. the fall of the communist meta-narration, promised a new, democratic, pluralistic order and gave hope for the removal of the existing barriers. Owing to the fledgling democracy, many minority groups won back the voice which they had been deprived of. The time of the postmodern/post-socialist opening up to such a difference began. The Polish social policy towards disability had also been transformed. The segregation policy of the socialist state changed to become one of inclusion, equality, equal opportunities, as well as activation and noticing of the needs of minority groups, which could finally openly discuss their needs as a part of the public discourse. The policy of employment of persons with disabilities is an immanent part of the process of emancipation. However, it should also be remembered that the introduction of new solutions adequate for the democratic political system and free market economy was not problem-free. As pointed out by T. Mladenov “post-socialist countries after 1989 may experience a new invalidation of persons with disabilities and a new cause of their exclusion from the job market – one related to the taking of the direction towards the market productivity of the new neoliberal regime”.<sup>3</sup>

In 2012, Poland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 27 of the document reads: “States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity

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<sup>2</sup> H. Cioch, *The influence of cooperative law on the development of cooperatives after 1989. 90 years of cooperative law (Wpływ prawa spółdzielczego na rozwój spółdzielczości po 1989 roku. 90 lat prawa spółdzielczego)*. Post-conference materials. Biuletyn Instytutu Stefczyka, Instytut Stefczyka, Warszawa 2010, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> T. Mladenov, *Questioning Productivism Through the Lens of Disability: Reflections on State Socialist and Postsocialist Disability Policy*, <https://alterconf2015.sciencesconf.org/conference/alterconf2015/pages/Livret.pdf> [15.04.2019].

to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted on a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. States Parties shall safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work, including for those who acquire a disability during the course of employment, by taking appropriate steps, including through legislation".<sup>4</sup> The rights included in the document opened up a space for perceiving persons with disabilities as citizens in their own right, as consumers, and people enjoying rights. Unfortunately, the realistic realisation of these rights in the everyday life in Poland poses some problems. The situation of people with disabilities on the labour market in Poland is unfavourable. The activity rate of persons with disabilities is very low and the vast majority of this group of people is excluded from the labour market. Persons with disabilities show a very high level of economic inactivity.<sup>5</sup> Various reports (BAEL, 2019; GUS, 2019)<sup>6</sup> provide that the economic activity rate for working age people with disabilities amounts to 30.2% while the employment rate to 28.2%. E. Giermanowska and M. Raław indicate that "in Poland, almost 60% of young persons with disabilities aged 25–34 years do not work and do not look for employment after completing their education – they are categorised as vocationally passive individuals, and only 28.5% of the total number of persons with disabilities with higher education are gainfully employed. The vocational activity of persons with disabilities in Poland is low despite the broad base of institutions and services designed to foster the vocational activation of this community".<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html> [15.04.2019].

<sup>5</sup> E. Wapiennik, *Report on the employment of disabled people in European countries. Country: Poland*. Academic Network of European Disability Experts (ANED), <https://www.disability-europe.net/downloads/508-pl-employment-report> [7.11.2019].

<sup>6</sup> Labour force survey in Poland II quarter 2019. Główny Urząd Statystyczny. Statistics Poland. Warszawa, [www.stat.gov.pl](http://www.stat.gov.pl) [7.11.2019].

<sup>7</sup> E. Giermanowska, M. Raław, *Between the politics of life, emancipation and pretending. Questions about a new model of social policy on the employment of disabled people (Pomiędzy polityką życia, emancypacją i jej pozorowaniem. Pytania o nowy model polityki*

Only a very small share of the working persons with disabilities have an intellectual disability. In our reality, such people are frequently not taken into consideration as potential employees. The lowest figures for the vocational activity of people with disabilities are recorded for persons with intellectual disabilities and amount to 8.5%.<sup>8</sup> Persons with intellectual disabilities are the group of the unemployed who find it most difficult to find a job. This is caused by social barriers and stereotypes concerning the poor value of work of persons with intellectual disabilities.<sup>9</sup>

Why does the vocational activity of persons with disabilities in Poland continue to be so low, despite the fact that considerable funds are designated for the purpose from the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (PFRON)? When analysing the employment situation of persons with disabilities in Great Britain, G. Mercer and C. Barnes concluded that the exclusion of this social group from the labour market may be explained by ill-suited transport, non-flexible conditions of employment, and the growing significance of formal qualifications.<sup>10</sup> A. Roulstone and C. Barnes pointed out that "perhaps more fundamentally, the view might be taken that disability and employment policy is premised on an inappropriate model of disability, that policy details and employment programmes may have failed or been severely weakened due to a misunderstanding of the disability problem. All of these explanations may of course hold clues as to the disability and employment paradoxes".<sup>11</sup> In Poland, the main barriers to the vocational activity

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*społecznej wobec zatrudnienia osób niepełnosprawnych*). „Studia Socjologiczne” 2(213), 2014, p. 113.

<sup>8</sup> D. Kukla, W. Duda, M. Czerw-Bajer, *People with disabilities in the education and vocational counseling system (Osoby niepełnosprawne w systemie edukacji i poradnictwa zawodowego)*, Difin, Warszawa 2011, p. 109.

<sup>9</sup> D. Kukla, W. Duda, M. Czerw-Bajer, *People with disabilities in the education and vocational counseling system (Osoby niepełnosprawne w systemie edukacji i poradnictwa zawodowego)*, Difin, Warszawa 2011, p. 127.

<sup>10</sup> C. Barnes, G. Mercer, *Disability (Niepełnosprawność)*, Sic!, Warszawa 2008, p. 61.

<sup>11</sup> C. Barnes, A. Roulstone (eds.), *Working futures? Disabled people, policy and social inclusion*. Policy Press University of Bristol, Bristol 2005, p. 1.

of persons with disabilities are the quality of the regulations concerning vocational rehabilitation<sup>12</sup>, mental barriers on the part of employers, self-marginalisation, and barriers in the area of qualifications and infrastructure.<sup>13</sup> The aforementioned problem of the invalidation of persons with disabilities in post-socialist countries due to the post-1989 turn towards the market productivity of the new neoliberal regime, as sketched by Mladenov, can be yet another reason. T. Mladenov stated “that productivism is regarded as a cultural-material mechanism that reduces humans to resources utilisable for the enhancement of productive output. A person with disabilities defined from the medical and productive point of view as one who is hardly efficient, is marginalized and invalidated in the productivist society”.<sup>14</sup>

## Methods and data

This paper is based on my broader research project entitled *Employment and disability. An analysis of the vocational experience of people with intellectual disabilities in Poland*. My explorations were focused on three fields. I first analysed assumptions, goals, trends and changes in the employment policy for people with intellectual disa-

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<sup>12</sup> E. Giermanowska, *The Disabled as an Employee and Employer (Niepełnosprawny jako pracownik i pracodawca)*, [in:] E. Zakrzewska-Manterys, J. Niedbalski (eds.), *Self-reliant, resourceful, independent. People with disabilities in the system of politics, work and education (Samodzielni, zaradni, niezależni. Ludzie niepełnosprawni w systemie polityki, pracy i edukacji)*, Wyd. Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2016, p. 87.

<sup>13</sup> N. Wasilewska, P. Nosał, *Disabled as a worker within the social economy system (Niepełnosprawny jako pracujący w systemie ekonomii społecznej)*, [in:] E. Zakrzewska-Manterys, J. Niedbalski (eds.), *Self-reliant, resourceful, independent. People with disabilities in the system of politics, work and education (Samodzielni, zaradni, niezależni. Ludzie niepełnosprawni w systemie polityki, pracy i edukacji)*, Wyd. Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2016, p. 151–152.

<sup>14</sup> T. Mladenov, *Questioning Productivism Through the Lens of Disability: Reflections on State Socialist and Postsocialist Disability Policy*, <https://alterconf2015.sciencesconf.org/conference/alterconf2015/pages/Livret.pdf> [15.04.2019].

bilities. Secondly, I focused on social activity practices within the area of vocational services (what, who, where, how?) – the analysed measures were related to four areas/places of employment support activity: occupational therapy workshops, sheltered workshops, social cooperatives and supported employment projects. Thirdly, I concentrated on the reconstruction of the vocational experience of persons involved in a work situation: job coaches, people with intellectual disabilities, and project/employment coordinators.

The methodological framework combined the grounded theory set in social constructivism, as presented in K. Charmaz's works, with discourse analysis and sociologically-oriented analysis of practices. The methodology of grounded theory comprises synthetic, but flexible guidelines concerning the collection and analysis of qualitative data aimed at the construction of theories "grounded" in these data.<sup>15</sup> The researcher seeks to learn what happens in the places under study and what the reality of the subjects is.<sup>16</sup> The proponents of the grounded theory start with data. They construct data through observation, interaction, and collected materials concerning a given topic and place.<sup>17</sup> The methodology of the grounded theory also offers a procedure of theoretical sampling, owing to which the researcher, when collecting, coding and analysing materials, simultaneously decides on an ongoing basis where and what sort of data to collect further.<sup>18</sup> Sampling is processual and takes place until theoretical saturation.<sup>19</sup>

I carried out my research from 1.10.2017 until 31.09.2018. Following the guidelines of the grounded theory methodology, I began with the collection of data, without assuming how many workplac-

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<sup>15</sup> K. Charmaz, *Grounded theory (Teoria ugruntowana)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2009, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> A.L. Strauss, J. Corbin, *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded Theory*, Sage: Thousand Oaks (CA), 1990, p. 177.

<sup>19</sup> K. Charmaz, *Grounded theory (Teoria ugruntowana)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2009, p. XVI.

es and persons will be covered by the project, and I completed my work upon the occurrence of theoretical saturation. Finally, the data were collected in 25 workplaces in various parts of Poland, by means of in-depth interviews, ethnographic interviews, observation, and field notes. An analysis of the assumptions of employment policy was based on a qualitative analysis of the contents of legislation governing the functioning of the system supporting vocational activity. The analysed documents included the new Act on Vocational and Social Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities, the Act on Social Cooperatives, and the Act on the Promotion of Employment and Institutions of the Labour Market.

Collecting data, conducting interviews, observing relations and developments in workplaces, analysing and coding materials, I decided where and what sort of data to collect on an ongoing basis. Very significant were both the similarity and diversity of cases. When choosing locations for my research, I therefore considered both different forms of businesses (such as breweries, cafes, laundries, carpentry and joinery workshops, hotels) as well as the specificity of the offered vocational support (social cooperatives, occupational activity establishments, occupational workshops, and supported employment projects). As a result, I conducted research (interviews and observations) in eight social cooperatives, four occupational activity establishments, five agencies delivering supported employment projects, and five occupational workshops. I analysed the job-related history of graduates of two special-needs vocational schools and I observed training conducted as a part of a project preparing persons with Down syndrome to work in the audience services department in the Shakespearean Theatre in Gdansk and the Music Theatre in Gdynia. What was significant was to grasp the diversity of the labour markets, as well as the local specificity of the functioning of workplaces, and this is why I conducted my research in various parts of Poland (in cities such as Gdansk, Gdynia, Warsaw, Poznan, Sopot, and Wroclaw, as well as small towns/ places such as Puck, Jaroslaw, Przyjezierze, Sztum, and Kamionek Wielki). Crucial was also the understanding of the specific nature of the



offered vocational support and the organisational specificity of various workplaces. Fieldwork in each workplace lasted for up to two weeks.

I conducted a total of 155 interviews, of which 101 were with persons with intellectual disabilities. The group of persons with intellectual disability who participated in my research comprised 50 men and 51 women aged from 26 to 55 years. I conducted 20 interviews with job coaches, 26 interviews with the coordinators of supported employment projects and occupational activity establishments, and 8 interviews with the founders of social cooperatives (the total of 54 interviews).

All the employees were informed about the purpose of my research. Only the persons with intellectual disability who wanted to share their experience related to work participated in my project. All the participants expressed an informed consent to participate in the interview, were informed that the interview would be recorded and also consented to that (the only exception were two persons who did not agree for the interview to be recorded, so in these cases I made notes while interviewing them). The research was carried out in compliance with ethical requirements, and all the participants were fully aware of the nature of their participation. During the project, the privacy of participants was respected, and confidentiality was guaranteed to them.<sup>20</sup> When entering the places in which persons with disabilities work, I was initially an alien, but over time, as I immersed in the environment I was exploring, in some sense I became its part. This allowed me to make interesting observations and made it easier to conduct interviews.

I began my analysis of the research material with the process of defining what the data concern. I provided labels to the particular segments, categorizing, summarising and explaining the particular data<sup>21</sup> In the grounded theory, coding comprises at least two stages:

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<sup>20</sup> E. Babbie, *Social research in practice (Badania społeczne w praktyce)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2006, pp. 515–519.

<sup>21</sup> K. Charmaz, *Grounded theory (Teoria ugruntowana)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2009, pp. 60–61.

the initial one, and the focused one.<sup>22</sup> After the initial coding, covering segments of data and constant comparison of the particular categories determining similarities and differences, I commenced the focused coding, which allowed me to synthesize data and identify the final analytical categories interpreting the job-related situation of persons with intellectual disability from the point of view of the assumptions of the employment policy and its clashing with the actual implementation in the reality, the diversity of practices of places offering vocational activity and the multitude of individual experiences concerning the situation of work and the meanings of work.

This article is based on data from the project, but presents only a short fragment of research results. The analyses focus on the presentation of the assumptions, goals, and trends of employment policy, ways in which the system supporting the vocational activity of persons with intellectual disabilities functions, and on the confrontation of these systemic assumptions with the experience of persons involved in the implementation of this employment policy in the Polish reality.

### **Employment policy and the vocational activity support system for people with intellectual disabilities in Poland – assumptions, goals, and trends**

The new Polish system of vocational rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities was created in 1991 when the Act on the Employment and Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities was introduced. At that time, the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities was developed with the aim to finance and create jobs for people with disabilities both in the open and sheltered employment market.

The policy of the employment of people with disabilities is based on a quota system – an obligation to employ 6% of people

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<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 64.

with disabilities in the company, as well as on financial incentives for employers – subsidized wages of persons with disabilities.<sup>23</sup> The State Fund for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities is fed by obligatory contributions from employers who do not employ the required percentage of employees with a disability. In this model, cost-related barriers to the demand for work performed by persons with disabilities are noticed and employers are motivated to employ persons with various deficits by the introduction of a “fee for failure to employ” a person with a disability<sup>24</sup>. Theoretically, the contributions and subsidised wages of employees with disabilities are to encourage employers to hire such employees.

In 1997, a new Act on Vocational and Social Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities was adopted. Under the act, occupational therapy workshops and occupational activity establishments were established. The act also regulates the functioning of sheltered workshops and the issue of the subsidies for the employers willing to employ persons with disabilities, either on the open or sheltered employment market. It is worth pointing out that occupational activity establishments and sheltered workshops are places of employment of the sheltered employment market. After the abolishment of “cooperatives of invalids” in the first half of the 1990s, which were perceived as “ghettos” of persons with disabilities and a symbol of the segregation policy, the sheltered employment market experienced a boom. It is in this sector that 30% of all the employed persons with disabilities found and maintained work.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Act on social and vocational rehabilitation and employment of disabled people (*Ustawa o rehabilitacji społecznej i zawodowej oraz zatrudnieniu osób niepełnosprawnych*), Journal of Laws. 1997 No. 123 It. 776, <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20060940651> [8.11.2019].

<sup>24</sup> See: Giermanowska, Raclaw (2014); Giermanowska, Raclaw, Szawarska (2019).

<sup>25</sup> E. Giermanowska, *The Disabled as an Employee and Employer (Niepełnosprawny jako pracownik i pracodawca)*, [in:] E. Zakrzewska-Manterys, J. Niedbalski (eds.), *Self-reliant, resourceful, independent. People with disabilities in the system of politics, work and education (Samodzielni, zaradni, niezależni. Ludzie niepełnosprawni w systemie polityki, pracy i edukacji)*, Wyd. Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2016, p. 69.

Occupational therapy workshops and occupational activity establishments are particularly important from the point of view of supporting the labour of persons with intellectual disabilities. In Poland, there are 700 occupational therapy workshops operating for 26,000 persons with severe or moderate disability.<sup>26</sup> They are facilities enabling social and vocational rehabilitation in the area of the acquisition or reacquisition of skills and abilities necessary to find employment. Under the Act on Vocational and Social Rehabilitation and the Employment of Persons with Disabilities, occupational therapy workshops are to prepare persons with disability through occupational therapy to undertake employment on the open or sheltered employment market. The Act provides further that after three years a person with disability should be able to find a job in a vocational activity support centre or on the open labour market.<sup>27</sup> This assumption, however, is in fact entirely utopian and is in no way implemented in the Polish reality.

In Poland, there are currently about 105 occupational activity establishments, which employ almost 4,000 persons with moderate or severe disability.<sup>28</sup> An occupational activity establishment is an organisationally and financially independent entity established to employ persons with severe or moderate disability, diagnosed with autism, intellectual disabilities, or a mental disease. Under the Act, occupational activity establishments should not be the target place of employment for people with disabilities – they are to prepare the employees to find and maintain a job on the open market.<sup>29</sup> This is, however, but another utopian and utterly non-feasible assumption.

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<sup>26</sup> pfron.org.pl/institucje/placowki/wtz/ [14.04.2020].

<sup>27</sup> *Act on social and vocational rehabilitation and employment of disabled people (Ustawa o rehabilitacji społecznej i zawodowej oraz zatrudnieniu osób niepełnosprawnych)*, Journal of Laws. 1997 No. 123 It. 776, <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20060940651> [8.11.2019].

<sup>28</sup> pfron.org.pl/institucje/placowki/zaz/ [14.04.2020].

<sup>29</sup> *Act on social and vocational rehabilitation and employment of disabled people (Ustawa o rehabilitacji społecznej i zawodowej oraz zatrudnieniu osób niepełnosprawnych)*, Journal of Laws. 1997 No. 123 It. 776, <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20060940651> [8.11.2019].

In 2001, a new form of activity: supported employment was introduced to the Polish market of support to vocational activity of persons with intellectual disabilities. It is worth adding that despite many activities and postulates of non-governmental organisations organising supported employment projects, this form of support of vocational activity has so far failed to be cemented in any concrete regulations and is carried out solely in the form of projects. Moreover, non-governmental organisations, which basically have taken over responsibility for the organisation of places of work for persons with intellectual disabilities, have recently established many social cooperatives. Social cooperatives are yet another proposed system solution, which came into being under the social cooperatives act of 2006 and its 2018 amendment. The introduction of the social cooperative in Poland is the result of close cooperation between the Polish Ministry of Labour and nongovernmental organisations. Social cooperatives are an element of the government's policies aiming to create jobs and limit social exclusion and marginalization.<sup>30</sup> A social cooperative is a social enterprise combining business with social goals and supporting persons at risk of social exclusion. Social cooperatives are places between the open and the sheltered employment market – they are not provided with the financial support available to occupational activity establishments, but for many job-seeking persons with disabilities they are the only possibility to win and maintain a job owing to support from a job coach and the employers' understanding of the specific nature of their disability.

Occupational therapy workshops, occupational activity establishments, supported employment, and social cooperatives were established to support the vocational activity and enable employment to persons with all kinds of disabilities. As places providing work and vocational rehabilitation, they are however in particular important to persons with intellectual disabilities, who find it very

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<sup>30</sup> E. Wapiennik, *Report on the employment of disabled people in European countries. Country: Poland*. Academic Network of European Disability Experts (ANED), <https://www.disability-europe.net/downloads/508-pl-employment-report> [7.11.2019].

hard to find and maintain a job on the open labour market. In Polish reality 98% of participants of occupational therapy workshops are persons with intellectual disabilities.<sup>31</sup> In occupational activity establishments, about 22% of employees are persons with intellectual disabilities.<sup>32</sup> Many social cooperatives have been founded solely to provide places of employment to persons with intellectual disabilities. Supported employment projects are largely designed for this group of persons and they are implemented by associations acting for the benefit of this community.

Summing up, what vocational activity support system for people with intellectual disabilities is offered now? After graduation, people with intellectual disabilities have the following options: they can become participants in occupational therapy workshops and community self-help centres, where they are prepared for employment. They can participate in supported employment projects, and they can find a job in a sheltered workshop, an occupational activity establishment, or a social cooperative. Actually, despite the supportive social policy, the system does not work as meant. These are only idealistic assumptions. The legislator failed to anticipate several issues in the entire employment jigsaw puzzle – in other words, a system was created, which somehow failed to evolve around the needs of adults with intellectual disabilities and possibilities for their finding of their place on the labour market. Nobody thought about the continuity of financing for places of work, support for employers or making sure there is a sufficient number of services. Nothing comes from the provision concerning the obligation to leave occupational therapy workshops after three years and under-

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<sup>31</sup> PFRON report. *Study of the condition of occupational therapy workshops. Final study report (Badanie sytuacji warsztatów terapii zajęciowej. Raport końcowy z badania)*. Laboratorium badań społecznych, Warsaw 2014, p. 64, [https://www.pfron.org.pl/fileadmin/files/r/5062\\_Raport\\_koncowy\\_WTZ.pdf](https://www.pfron.org.pl/fileadmin/files/r/5062_Raport_koncowy_WTZ.pdf) [20.04.2020].

<sup>32</sup> PFRON report. *Research on workshops of professional activity. Final report (Badanie zakładów aktywności zawodowej. Raport końcowy)*, Warsaw 2017, p. 10, <https://www.pfron.org.pl/aktualnosci/archiwum/szczegoly-aktualnosci/news/badanie-zakladow-aktywnosci-zawodowej/> [20.04.2020].

taking employment – as aforementioned, it is a utopian and wishful assumption, since there is no “further course”. As results from many PFRON reports, there is an insufficient number of occupational activity establishments. Coordinators of supported employment projects participating in my research also indicate that supported employment projects have limited financing. People wait for years to be granted a subsidy for the establishment of a social cooperative, and it is also very difficult to maintain such an initiative on the market. Additionally, discouraged by the complexity of the regulations concerning the subsidizing procedures, employers often resign from hiring employees with disabilities.<sup>33</sup> The provision of the act specifying that occupational activity establishments are only a transient form of employment is also utopian – in practice, very few employees leave the sheltered employment market.<sup>34</sup>

Despite many utopian assumptions and a certain absence of systemic thinking about persons with intellectual disabilities as a group in terms of employees, many non-governmental organisations fight for places of work and carry out supported employment projects. Thus, respecting the right of persons with disabilities to work, they create realistic opportunities for them to find employment and keep their jobs. Analysing these projects, we should add that following the idea of the decentralization of power introduced after 1989, the aims and tasks of the social policy and the employment policy regarding people with disabilities, drawing upon legal acts put forth by the government, are implemented by local governments: Regional Centres for Social Policy. Therefore, while examining the

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<sup>33</sup> E. Giermanowska, *The Disabled as an Employee and Employer (Niepełnosprawny jako pracownik i pracodawca)*, [in:] E. Zakrzewska-Manterys, J. Niedbalski (eds.), *Self-reliant, resourceful, independent. People with disabilities in the system of politics, work and education (Samodzielni, zaradni, niezależni. Ludzie niepełnosprawni w systemie polityki, pracy i edukacji)*, Wyd. Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2016, p. 87.

<sup>34</sup> PFRON report. *Research on workshops of professional activity. Final report (Badanie zakładów aktywności zawodowej. Raport końcowy)*, Warszawa 2017, p. 10, <https://www.pfron.org.pl/aktualnosci/archiwum/szczegoly-aktualnosci/news/badanie-zakladow-aktywnosci-zawodowej/> [20.04.2020].

situation in Poland, one may notice an asymmetry of activities. Varying accomplishments regarding the activities supporting the vocational activity of people with intellectual disabilities in the particular local governments can be observed. As an example of such an asymmetry we may indicate the number of occupational activity establishments in a given voivodship: there are, for instance, as many as 14 of them in the Podkarpackie voivodship, and just two in the Pomorskie voivodship. Practically speaking, supported employment projects are implemented only in larger Polish cities. Moreover, when looking at the vocational activity support system for persons with intellectual disabilities, one may again conclude that both the system and the workplaces are mainly created owing to the local initiatives of NGOs, parents, local leaders, and other people tired of stagnation and the lack of possibilities.

**Employment policy and the vocational activity support  
system for people with intellectual disabilities  
in the reconstruction of the experience of persons  
involved in a work situation: job coaches, people with  
intellectual disabilities, project/employment coordinators**

I shall begin the presentation of reconstructions of the experience of persons involved in the situation of work and shall show from this perspective the employment policy and the system of support of the vocational activity system, by sketching the situation on the labour market.

What is the situation on the labour market? What situation on the labour market is revealed by the narrations of the subjects? First of all, all of them indicate an absence of employers willing to employ persons with intellectual disabilities. Employers hardly ever take into account the fact that this group of persons with disabilities might actually make employees. Employers do not know how to support such employees, and have some doubts as to their skills



and abilities. We may say that there is a lack of employers willing to hire people with intellectual disabilities. As the subjects put it:

For 16 years, J. has been the supervisor of the occupational therapy workshop in Puck. He attempted to push people with intellectual disabilities to enter the open labour market; however, they would come back like a boomerang, no one would employ them. They require constant supervision and support. No employer can afford to provide such a thing, despite wage subsidies. The efficiency of such a person is much lower, stereotypes prevail, and people are cautious and feel uncomfortable when working with persons with intellectual disabilities (founder of the social cooperative *Brewery* in Puck).

After graduating from a special vocational school, our children weren't offered any support. They would end up sitting at home with a remote control in their hands (founder of the social cooperative *Cafe* in Warszawa).

Another issue the subjects mention is that the open labour market is slowly opening up to the employment of people with intellectual disabilities, but the problem is that although some employers want to employ people with a disability certificate, they expect from them a quality of work as high as that of regular workers. To be more precise, this means that employers do not acknowledge the fact that an employee with intellectual disabilities may need more time to perform an activity, that one needs to remind them of certain things. Employers rarely tolerate smaller efficiency and this is one of the reasons why many employees with intellectual disabilities fail to keep their jobs on the open market. This is how the employees themselves perceive the situation:

I went to work as a gardener. I worked there for a month. They didn't want me. I didn't like it there. Because I had to do things quickly, quickly, while I prefer doing things slowly and accurately (currently, a worker of the social cooperative *Cafe* in Warszawa).

I was recommended for a job at the Second World War Museum, I went there and they said that they wanted to employ someone with a disability certificate. I was there for 3 months, on probation. Some-

times things did not go well, I was tired, dishes would break by accident, there were various days. I was a waitress there, I cleaned tables and took away dirty dishes. Difficult work, crowds of people, sometimes you had to work fast, cakes here, coffee there, dirty dishes. When there was a crowd of people, when there were so many stimuli, so many things at the same time, and I cannot do it this way, I have to finish one thing and start another one. The girls rushed me. They did not make my work easier, I was the first person with a disability certificate there, and they did not know how to behave (currently, a worker of the social cooperative *Cafe* in Gdańsk).

The coordinators of employment projects and persons with disabilities themselves also mention another problem – the insufficient number of occupational activity establishments. In their opinion, there are not enough workplaces in the sheltered employment market.

In order for someone to be able to get out of the occupational therapy workshop, you need to create workplaces. In Poznań, the sheltered (employment) workshop has never been established despite efforts, so there is no place to send the people (founder of the social cooperative *Cafe* in Poznań).

It is my first work, my first company. I was looking for work, and I submitted different applications. The occupational activity establishment gave me a chance to work. It is a very good thing; we do not just sit at home, everyone has their own obligation, their activity. I am 36 years old, and I started to work when I was 34 – do you know how hard life is when you do nothing? You would like to do something, you would like to be necessary, but there is always this disability. For me it is like heaven and earth, what I have now and what I used to have (employee of the occupational activity establishment, Przyjezierze).

An absence of the willing employers, their failure to understand the capabilities of persons with disabilities in the workplace, a shortage of job coaches supporting both the employers and the employees with disabilities, the expectation of the same efficiency, and the insufficient number of jobs on the sheltered employment market are the main problems marking the contemporary area at the border between the labour market and disability.

What is the reality of social cooperatives? As aforementioned, social cooperatives as social enterprises have been functioning in Poland since 2006. For many persons with intellectual disabilities, they are the only available places of employment. In Poland, we are currently experiencing a boom of social cooperatives. Many non-governmental organisations are trying to win funding from EU funds. Cafes employing persons with intellectual disabilities are very popular. Despite the huge popularity of social enterprises, they are challenged with many difficulties. The first issue is the financial difficulties and struggle to keep on the market. Social cooperatives receive subsidies from European Union Funds to initiate operations. The funds are distributed by the Social Economy Support Centre. Co-financing is received through a competition. You can wait several years for it. Afterwards, the wage subsidies for people with intellectual disabilities are the only form of financial support from the State Fund.

We employ people who have had a very tough time in the open labour market, either finding no job at all, or losing their former jobs. Working with people with intellectual disabilities is quite specific – one must often correct their mistakes, and it doesn't always pay off financially. Additionally, people are cautious when dealing with such cooperatives; they have to learn to trust them. We are constantly struggling financially (manager of the social cooperative in Jarosław).

We employ 18 persons with intellectual disabilities: 11 in the Brewery, and 7 in the Pub. The social cooperative is the most difficult form of economic activity in Poland (founder of the social cooperative *Brewery* in Puck).

Not only the financial struggle bothers social cooperatives, but also the reception of their services and products by clients:

We were afraid that there would be nobody willing to drink beer made by persons with intellectual disabilities (founder of the social cooperative *Brewery* in Puck).

Haters commented: 'They will drool, stink, put their fingers in the soup'. However, they accepted us as normal people providing high-quality services (founder of the social cooperative *Cafe* in Poznań).

What is the reality of occupational activity establishments? The occupational activity establishments receive subsidies from the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (PFRON) to support the wages of people with disabilities, as well as the wages of their instructors. The State Fund for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities covers up to 90% of the cost of the functioning of occupational activity establishments. Therefore, they are very expensive for the state and are often suspended by local governments. This results from the insufficient funds provided by PFRON to the local governments. Moreover, the financing has not increased in the last 10 years, whereas the minimum wage has increased. Therefore, numerous occupational activity establishments deal with financial issues. They seek aid through EU funds. One may speak of the insufficient number of occupational activity establishments in comparison with demand, and their asymmetrical distribution in Poland. It is a result of the policies of particular voivodships.

The steady financing is the key to success, as I state all the time, in regard to people with intellectual disabilities; the programme should not be planned for a year, but years, and it should be evaluated if possible (manager of the occupational activity establishment in Sztum).

Another problem indicated by the coordinators of occupational activity establishments is the poor rotation of employees with disabilities, resulting from the absence of employers on the open labour market willing to employ them. It is worth adding that owing to long-voiced postulates of the Polish Association of Employers of Occupational Activity Establishments (*Ogólnopolski Związek Pracodawców Zakładów Aktywności Zawodowej*), the subsidy for the employment of persons with disabilities was increased as of 1.10.2019.

What is the reality of supported employment projects? They have been implemented in Poland since 2001. 2015 witnessed the establishment of Polska Federacja Zatrudnienia Wspomaganego (*Polish Federation of Supported Employment*), aiming at the promotion of the supported employment model, which makes it possible for people with disabilities, who experience special difficulties with the

acquisition and keeping of paid jobs on the open labour market, to work for money on an equal basis with others. More than 4,500 persons with disabilities participated all over Poland in the many supported employment projects organized by a variety of non-governmental organisations during 19 years of their operation. More than 1,500 such persons, supported by a job coach, found work, and more than 1,000 employers were provided with personnel consultancy services<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, no data are available as to how many persons managed to keep their jobs. What problems in this sector of employment support are disclosed in the narrations of the subjects? The first issue is the financing of the projects and the continuity of the financing. The supported employment projects have been provided only by NGOs in the last 19 years on a project basis. Therefore, it is difficult to ensure the continuity of projects and raise funding. This also results in a limitation of the number of participants. As project coordinators and job coaches say:

We are dealing with a lack of strategic framework for supported employment – as well as a lack of system-level solutions (coordinator of supported employment projects, Polish Association for People with Intellectual Disabilities, Warszawa).

Continuity of support is a priority. The people need to get support. If you leave an employee with intellectual disability without the support of a job coach, he/she will lose the job and end up with nothing (job coach working for supported employment projects, Polish Association for People with Intellectual Disabilities, Gdańsk).

We cannot give up supporting the employed people with disabilities, but what do we do when we don't have the financing for two months? The system requires, but does not help (coordinator of supported employment projects, Polish Association for People with Intellectual Disabilities, Gdańsk).

Yet another issue is the uncertainty of support and employment, which is also difficult for employees with intellectual disabilities:

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<sup>35</sup> [www.pfzw.pl](http://www.pfzw.pl) [14.04.2020].

For now, I have this job until March. These are cleaning works. The agency for supported employment has just searched for me. And what will happen next? (employee with intellectual disability).

Another problem is an absence of a regulatory framework concerning supported employment. The Polish Federation of Supported Employment (*Polska Federacja Zatrudnienia Wspomagane*) has been fighting for years for the development of an Act on Supported Employment, which would regulate the financing of this form of support to vocational activity and provide detailed requirements concerning the job of a job coach.

### **The employment policy and vocational activity support system for people with intellectual disabilities in Poland: emancipation policy or apparent actions?**

Despite the many difficulties in the organisation of vocational support to persons with intellectual disabilities, many non-governmental organisations fight for places of work for this group of persons, developing the social economy sector and carrying out supported employment projects. When, while interviewing coordinators of vocational activity support projects, I asked them a rather provocative question: why should persons with intellectual disabilities work at all and what do they need work for, as well as whether occupational therapy in an occupational therapy workshop or a community self-help centre is not sufficient, I first saw astonishment in their eyes, and then I heard:

Under the Convention (CPRD), everyone has the right to work, and under the Constitution, everyone has the right to dignity. In order to earn money, to then be able to fulfil one's dreams. Why should not a person with a disability have the possibility to work if he or she wants to; obviously, when he or she does not want to, that's it, we shall not make anyone do it. If there is a person who wants it, then it is my task to work with this person on it. I have a person who wants to work,

but she is not aware of what work means. And it is my task to work with her, not discourage her, but make her understand what work is and to finally prepare her for taking a decision (founder of the social cooperative *Café* in Gdańsk).

This is the way this world works: adults work and disability has nothing to do with it. If people want to earn their living, if they want to feel satisfaction with life and if they want to have a quality life, they need to work. We want to contact people, we want to have friends, we want to have life that is like this and not like any other, one that we want to have, and so we need to work, this is the way this world goes. The society is to implement equal treatment and that's it (coordinator of supported employment projects, Warszawa).

The above statements highlighting the rights of persons with disabilities refer to the equality policy, but also reveal a perspective of the social meanings of work. Work is a meaningful practice and one of the basic determinants of human life, which determines one's social status and therefore one's life opportunities, and which, consequently, shapes the identity of the subject – the subject of work.<sup>36</sup> Work constitutes a universal value in two senses – other values relate to it, and it is a determinant of human value. The universalism of work as a value, in particular in the constructivist and pragmatic sense, lies above all in the fact that the general public must of necessity relate to it. In other words, if you fail to relate to work, then, in a sense, work will relate to you, or, to be more precise, the society will relate to you, pushing you to the margin of its life.<sup>37</sup> I think that it is the awareness of social meanings given to work which is a force driving non-governmental organisations operating for the benefit of persons with disabilities in Poland, parents, and people with intellectual disabilities themselves to undertake the huge, in Polish conditions, effort of the creation of places of work, social cooperatives,

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<sup>36</sup> P. Stańczyk, *Praca*. In M. Cackowska, L. Kopciewicz, M. Patalon, P. Stańczyk, K. Starego, T. Szkudlarek, *Discursive structure of the subject (Dyskursywna konstrukcja podmiotu)*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, Gdańsk 2012, p. 155.

<sup>37</sup> S.M. Kwiatkowski, *Pedagogy of work (Pedagogika pracy)*, [in:] B. Śliwerski (eds.), *Pedagogika*, GWP, Gdańsk 2006.

and supported employment projects. For many employees with intellectual disabilities, work is a source of a sense of being useful and valuable. It is a chance for being a fully-fledged consumer. This perspective is expressed in the following statement:

I work, because I like it. Work gives me satisfaction, I don't just sit at home and I am among other people. I have a computer, which I bought myself. Without work, my life would be grey and sad, I would perish without work. I would not be valuable without work (employee, occupational activity establishment, Jarosław)

Such a perception of work leads us towards idea of the work ethic. Presenting the idea of the work ethic, Z. Bauman pointed out "that it is (...) one commandment with two unspoken premises and two tacit assumptions. The first unspoken premise (...) is always *quid pro quo*, 'tit for tat'. (...) The second outspoken premise is that (...) working is a value in its own right, a noble and ennobling activity. The commandment follows: you should go on working even if you do not see what that could bring you which you do not have already or don't think you need. To work is good, not to work is evil. (...) Work is the normal state of all humans; not working is abnormal".<sup>38</sup> Z. Bauman believed "that since the ethic of work burst into the European consciousness at the early stage of industrialisation, it was used equally by politicians, philosophers and preachers as a call or a justification behind attempts at the eradication, at all costs, of the "widespread inclination to avoid (...) the ostensible blessings of (...) employment".<sup>39</sup> Work was to build a brave new world. We live in a consumer society. Z. Bauman further writes that "in a consumer society, a 'normal life' is the life of consumers, preoccupied with making their choices among the panoply of publicly displayed opportunities for pleasurable sensations and lively experiences. In a consumer society, (...) having no access to a happy or merely a normal life means to be consumers *manqués*,

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<sup>38</sup> Z. Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, Open University Press, Philadelphia 1998, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6.



or flawed consumers. Poverty means being excluded from whatever passes for a 'normal life'. In a society of consumers, it is above all the inadequacy of the person as a consumer that leads to social degradation and the 'internal exile'".<sup>40</sup> In this context, working citizens with intellectual disabilities have a chance to be consumers in their own right; people, who just like other members of society, can use a multitude of the publicly offered opportunities. Work offers them an opportunity to leave exclusion behind, as it can be a tool of emancipation in the area of the familiar and accepted social order.

I would like to go back to the question posed in the title: can we conclude that the Polish employment policy is a policy of emancipation or is it marked by many activities that are apparent and legitimise exclusion, as well as utopian assumptions which fail to result in anything for persons with intellectual disabilities on the labour market? For A. Giddens, emancipation means that collective life is organised in such a way that the individuals are capable – in some sense or another – of free and independent action in the environments of their social life. For A. Giddens, emancipatory politics is a politics of life chances, and the politics of life is the politics of lifestyle choices, "politics of choice", the politics of choosing one's own lifestyle.<sup>41</sup>

For many people with intellectual disabilities, to be an employee means to be independent, free, and self-accomplishing. Therefore, they choose this path, to be an employee, if they are provided with the right conditions. In Poland, we have initiated a process of emancipation, we have acknowledged the people with disabilities as legitimate citizens with the right of access to all social goods – that is, including the access to work in both the sheltered and the open labour market. Unfortunately, examining the activities that, by creating employment, provide people with intellectual disabilities with vocational opportunities, and the employment policy that should support these activities, one may notice many apparent actions. One

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<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, p. 38.

<sup>41</sup> A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Blackwell Publishers, Cambridge 1991, pp. 210–214.

may have a feeling that there is no consistent employment policy regarding persons with intellectual disabilities. One may also feel that there is an enormous gap between acknowledging people with intellectual disabilities as legitimate citizens and the accomplishment of their rights. Therefore, we may speak about an unfinished process of emancipation. People with intellectual disabilities are acknowledged as legitimate citizens only seemingly, while in reality, they are often not considered to be real employees or people with the right to choose. The systemic thinking about being an adult is missing here. A question often arises: "A job? Why would they need a job?" Owing to the activities of NGOs, a number of supported employment projects are being implemented and social cooperatives are formed. Unfortunately, a job is given and then it is taken away. The project ends, there is no continuous financing, and social cooperatives go bankrupt. Despite provisions in the act regarding the sheltered workshops as places of vocational activity, there are still too few of them. They are too costly, so no new workshops are established. Additionally, it is very difficult for people with intellectual disabilities to "leave" the ones that exist and enter the open labour market, as there are no employers eager to employ such people, and there are difficulties in meeting their expectations. The open market is seemingly open to people with intellectual disabilities, but in reality employees often lose their jobs due to their low efficiency/productivity and due to lack of support from their job coaches. Currently, societies for people with disabilities (Polish Federation of Supported Employment, Polish Association of Organizers of Sheltered Workshops, Association for Social Cooperatives, and Polish Association for People with Intellectual Disabilities) are fighting for an employment policy that will recognize the diversity of needs, for the continuity of funding for supported employment projects, for financial support for the sheltered employment market, and for facilitating the creation of social cooperatives.

Going back to Giddens's idea of the politics of emancipation and politics of life, we may ask another question: do persons with intellectual disabilities have a possibility to choose their lifestyle in to-

day's Poland? Do they have a chance for freedom and independent activity as a part of social life in our society? Do they have a chance for a job considering the current socio-political manner of thinking about the difference of persons with intellectual disabilities in the context of the world of work? They do, and they do not. Unfortunately, as R. Piotrowicz points out, "the society does not treat persons with intellectual disability as adults, i.e. mature individuals, who are capable of autonomy, self-determination and work. This is a result of the stereotypical perception of adult persons with disabilities as 'eternal children'".<sup>42</sup>

Some hope for changing the situation could result from the shaping of the policy of employment of persons with disabilities through the lenses of the policy of equality and J. Rancière's concept of emancipation.<sup>43</sup> As a part of J. Rancière's approach, "the only realistic emancipatory project is an assumption of the fundamental equality of people's intelligence and the activity that will "verify" this assumption – in the sense that it will make it true in our actions. Differences between human capital, human abilities and human possibilities should not be "equalised": we should ignore them, assuming that everyone can do everything – and we should ceaselessly check in our activity how much we can achieve in this way".<sup>44</sup> Analysing Rancière's concept of emancipation, T. Szkudlarek points out "that he is perfectly aware of the fact that the assumption of the equality of all intelligence sounds naive. What do we achieve by assuming that everyone can learn everything? What do we achieve

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<sup>42</sup> R. Piotrowicz, *Determinants of adulthood in people with Down syndrome* (Wyznaczniki dorosłości osób z zespołem Downa), [in:] B. Kaczmarek (Eds.), *Difficult adulthood of people with Down syndrome* (Trudna dorosłość osób z zespołem Downa), Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków 2010, p. 86.

<sup>43</sup> J. Rancière, *Dividing the perceivable. Aesthetics and politics* (Dzielenie postrzegalnego. Estetyka i polityka), Ha!art, Kraków 2007; J. Rancière, *On the shores of politics* (Na brzegach politycznego), Ha!art, Kraków 2008.

<sup>44</sup> T. Szkudlarek, *Differences, equality and education: politics of inclusion and ignorance* (Różnice, równość i edukacja: polityki inkluzji i ignorancja), [in:] T. Szkudlarek, A. Komorowska-Zielony (eds.), *Differences, education, inclusion* (Różnice, edukacja, inkluzja), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, Gdańsk 2015, p. 67.

assuming that this is impossible? Let us check what will happen when we assume that everyone can learn".<sup>45</sup> J. Rancière's theory of politics, as analysed by T. Szkudlarek, is developed on the basis of the concept of the "distribution of the sensible", i.e. aesthetic regimes of the perception of reality operating with the limits of visibility, audibility and comprehensibility, which create the framework of the common world.<sup>46</sup> J. Rancière calls the element stabilising the framework the police, and the element which moves it – politics in its strict sense. Education plays an extremely significant role in these processes – both in the area of the stabilization of the limits of the perception of the reality by the police, and their "political" translocation. In this context, emancipation is an act of dissensus, an activity which is "out of place" and which speaks "at the wrong time", a demonstration of presence where we were not to be, and a manifestation of skills and abilities in the area of competences which, by assumption, we should not have.<sup>47</sup> Owing to being comfortable in the role of an employee, persons with intellectual disabilities, manifesting skills and abilities nobody thought they have, in the workplaces, in which they were not employed previously, can carry out their emancipation project.

Today in Poland it is time to reformulate support measures, to listen to the voice of people for whom employment is organised; it is time to let them live their alternative forms of being-in-the-world, time to combine paid employment with other forms of work, time for "acts of dissensus" and actions that are "out of place". Perhaps also the next step towards emancipation and the politics of choice should be a reformulation of the thinking about employment. U. Beck<sup>48</sup> formed a theory of a civil society alternative to the current

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<sup>45</sup> T. Szkudlarek, Differences, equality and education: politics of inclusion and ignorance (*Różnice, równość i edukacja: polityki inkluzji i ignorancja*), [in:] T. Szkudlarek, A. Komorowska-Zielony (eds.), *Differences, education, inclusion (Różnice, edukacja, inkluzja)*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, Gdańsk 2015, p. 69.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>48</sup> U. Beck, *The Brave New World of Work*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2005, p. 6.

society, based on the involvement of citizens in various types of work. The idea refers to a wide definition of work, encompassing not only activities related to professional work, but also various types of activity like housework, educational work and voluntary service. In the perspective of the “politics of life”, people with disabilities have the possibility of choosing their own lifestyles, based not only on their income but on other forms of activity that are a broadly perceived useful work as well. A. Roulstone and C. Barnes also conclude “that here work can be taken to mean much more than paid employment, while working relates to new policy ideas that function to include rather than exclude or coerce persons with disabilities”.<sup>49</sup>

The statement of an employee with an intellectual disability quoted below can be an example of such a change in the way we think about work, activity, the choice of a lifestyle, independence and decisions:

I work on Fridays, once a week. I always plan it myself, I come to the Community Self-Help Centre to work and provide voluntary service there. When I was working I became a voluntary worker. We have this project, the “Active Voluntary Work” in Sopot. We help others, for free, without any money involved. We provide help during various events. I am a member of the *On the Path of Expression* Association. I made my own adult decision, to do something. Maybe, I will do something for Sopot. It is my manly decision, to go further, not stay in one place, to do something for myself (employee with intellectual disability from Sopot).

## Conclusions

This article presents a clash between the assumptions of the policy of the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities, and

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<sup>49</sup> C. Barnes, A. Roulstone (eds.), *Working futures? Disabled people, policy and social inclusion*, Policy Press University of Bristol, Bristol 2005, p. vii.

a realistic possibility to implement them in the Polish reality. Without any doubt, the Polish employment policy promotes, in its assumptions, the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities. This is related to the policy of standardisation, equality, and social inclusion, and the dissemination of the strategy of equality and diversity. However, the experience of persons involved in the creation of places of work as well as that of employees with intellectual disabilities themselves shows that the implementation of the assumptions is very difficult. Nevertheless, many non-governmental organisations conscious of the meaning of work for persons with intellectual disabilities fight for the creation of the space in which such persons could fulfil themselves as employees. E. Zakrzewska-Manterys concludes that “the undertaking of employment by persons with intellectual disabilities is a ‘historical necessity’. One cannot reverse the course of history. The history of the emancipation of persons with intellectual disabilities, taking place in the last decades, is a history covering their right to healthcare, to education, to the selection of a lifestyle, a peer group, and manners of spending their free time. As a society, we are witnessing the expansion of emancipatory measures onto the sphere of work”.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> E. Zakrzewska-Manterys (eds.), *Manual for those interested in introducing mentally disabled people to the labor market to the social sector (Podręcznik dla zainteresowanych wprowadzaniem osób upośledzonych umysłowo na rynek pracy do sektora społecznego)*, PFRON, Warszawa 2014, p. 52.

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